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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by Christian Solidarity International, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[3 March 1995]

Disappearances and "cultural cleansing" of children in the Sudan

1. Christian Solidarity International is gravely concerned about the findings of an American-Dutch delegation representing the Puebla Institute and Dorkas Aid International which visited Khartoum and the surrounding area from 23 January to 2 February 1995*. Among other serious abuses, the delegation documented widespread Government-sponsored abductions and disappearances of children, and a campaign of "cultural cleansing" targeted at minority groups - Africans, Christians and animists. In this report "cultural cleansing" is distinguished from "ethnic cleansing". The latter is an attempt to

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* The Puebla Institute is a private United States-based human rights group that defends religious freedom for people of all creeds, in all parts of the world. Dorkas Aid International is a Dutch relief and development organization that works in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe to alleviate poverty, provide emergency aid, and finance sustainable development projects.

exterminate a genetically determined group through genocidal practices. The delegation received many reports of "ethnic cleansing" in the Nuba Mountains. Cultural cleansing, by contrast, is an attempt to eliminate a cultural group by stripping them of their unique cultural attributes, including religion, language, and name. All parties engaged in the Sudanese civil war are guilty of human rights abuses which harm children and we condemn them; however, this brief statement focuses only on one of these, "cultural cleansing".

2. The delegation received numerous credible reports from families concerned and independent observers about children who had been snatched by government agents from public places and summarily taken to camps where they were detained far from their families. These children, who are largely African Christians or animists, describe high-security, closed camps in remote areas where they are given new Arabic names, indoctrinated in Islam, and forced to undergo military-style training. The ultimate fate of these children is uncertain, but there are multiple reports that they are pressed into military combat.

3. The evidence gathered by the delegation recently in Sudan corroborates the findings on the children's camps by the Special Rapporteur, Gaspár Biró. The Government claims it is merely trying to provide food, safety and vocational training for vagrant children. However, many children taken to these camps had been living with family members. Furthermore, there is little evidence of vocational training at these camps and the food is often nutritionally deficient and scarce. Despite these deplorable conditions, the Government refuses access to international relief and church groups. The absolute secrecy surrounding these camps strongly suggests the Government has something heinous to hide.

4. The following cases are samples of the many reports received by the Puebla-Dorkas delegation. The names have been changed to protect victims and sources from reprisal.

5. John, who is an administrator for an NGO, described to the delegation the case of his neighbour Mary, an African Christian. Mary's two sons, six and nine years old, were kidnapped in a kasha (a government "round-up") one evening in 1993. After three months of searching, Mary traced her children to a camp near the town of Fao. The police sternly told her that if she did not find her sons on this attempt she could never return. While walking through the camp, her children recognized her and ran to her. They were both dressed in damuria, the characteristic dress of those undergoing Popular Defence Force training. She brought them home in that garb. John, the source, noted numbers on the children's garments. The older boy's number was 4396. Her sons described being treated harshly, given new Arabic names, and being forced to learn Islam.

6. The uniforms and the numbers assigned, as described in the above case, give further credence to the military-style regimentation these children claim to have experienced. One wonders whether the numbers assigned indicate the number of children who have been detained at the Fao camp. This camp has special significance because it was visited by a member of the Puebla-Dorkas delegation on 1 February 1995 and was found to be empty except for two guards. The children who had disappeared once had disappeared again.

7. The father of another African Christian boy told the delegation his 13-year-old son was stopped by police on his way home from school on 27 December 1993. When he failed to produce his school ID card, he was detained and taken by security forces to a camp at Soba, near Khartoum. About a week later he was transferred to another camp, Abu Dom. He described it as a religious training centre with a fence around the perimeter. There he was required to dig with a spade every day and forced to recite the Koran. He said, "the leaders wore white robes and carried whips". He attempted to escape through a hole in the fence but was caught and severely beaten. After a frantic search the father was finally able to locate and retrieve his son with the help of a friend in the police.

8. This case shows the level of control that is imposed upon Sudanese society. Even children must carry identity cards documenting their status as students or risk being swept up in a kasha. It also corroborates other reports about the camp at Soba which had been described as a clearing facility. Children from Khartoum are often taken there, kept for about a week and then, based on undisclosed criteria, are transferred to other camps.

9. James, a neighbour of Michael, a 10-year-old African Christian boy from Kalakala, told the delegation of this boy's recent ordeal. In November 1994, Michael was at the market near his home when he was swept up in a kasha. He was taken to a camp far from home where he was allowed to sleep only a few hours a night, was frequently hungry and fed only beans. He said there were many children from the south and they were severely beaten if they tried to escape. A guard at the camp from the boy's neighbourhood recognized him and informed his father of his whereabouts. The father finally retrieved his son on 20 December 1994, after overcoming bureaucratic obstacles and interrogation by officials who demanded to know how he discovered the camp.

10. Michael's case illustrates another common pattern - one of indifference and even hostility by officials towards parents trying to find their detained children. The retrieval of children, on the rare occasions it occurs, comes about through informal contacts with authorities and not through any reliable legal procedure.

11. Peter, a 17-year-old Dinka from Rumbek, was caught in a kasha with other boys at the cinema Watania Gharbi. They were assembled with over 500 youths at Dar Bashair (Abu Dijana and Ebeid Khatim camps) and then taken to military camp, Durdeib in Port Sudan. He attested:

> "They promised to train us in various technical fields such as mechanics and carpentry, but they offered only Islamic, Arabic language and military training. They offered us gifts if we agreed to convert to Islam, and if we refused, more forceful measures were used. They said we must be made Muslim by all means. I spent one year and two months at Durdeib camp. I saw and experienced a lot of suffering. One boy from the west died. We were not allowed to talk about him or we would be punished. From there I was transferred to Fao II camp to help in military training of boys. After 17 days I escaped."

12. It should be noted that all of these cases describe the taking of boys who were not orphans but who lived at home with an intact family structure. They illustrate a pattern of disregard for the integrity of the family and the parent-child relationship.

13. Dr. Kevin Vigilante, a physician and a member of the delegation who visited the children's camp called Fao II concluded: "Rather than vocational training camps, these are actually 'cultural cleansing' camps, where thousands of Christians and animist African children are being stripped of their cultural identity and forced to adopt a new identity that conforms to the prevailing culture of the ruling regime. In the context of Sudan's civil war, this appears at best to be a contemptible counterinsurgency programme designed to control a population of children misperceived as a threat by the Government. At worst it is an attempt to convert this vulnerable population into an ideologically pure and expendable fighting force. Given the Government's stated goal of raising a 1 million man army, the motivation for the militarization of these children is strong".

14. In summary, the current regime aims to achieve complete political, military and cultural control in order to solidify power. Religious persecution and the organized cultural cleansing of an entire generation of African Christian and animist children are strategic measures to achieve this objective.

15. In conclusion Christian Solidarity International urges this distinguished Commission to:

(a) Recommend that the Secretary-General's expert undertaking the study on the impact of armed conflict on children examine closely the condition of children in the Sudan, with particular regard to those who have been incarcerated in cultural cleansing camps;

(b) Give full support to the Special Rapporteur, Gaspár Biró, and ensure that he has access to the entire territory of the Sudan;

(c) Provide independent human rights monitors in the Sudan who will give particular attention to the plight of children;

(d) Ensure that humanitarian relief reaches those who need it by allowing free access to all entities willing to provide relief;

(e) Urge States members of the Commission to withhold IMF support until basic human rights in the Sudan are respected.